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ABSTRACT

The debate on the merits of classical education is reviewed through an examination of views of Henry Sidgwick in his "Essays on a Liberal Education" (1867). Running commentary focuses on two major concepts: (1) considerable change in teaching methodology is necessary if Latin is to survive, and (2) a majority of teachers in classical studies need to become convinced of the necessity and relevance of educational change. The author comments extensively on the benefits which accrue directly and indirectly to the student of Latin. (RL)

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A Theory of Classical Education

R. R. BOLGAR

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Facilis descensus Averno
Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis
Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras
Hoc opus, hic labor est.

1867

The debate on the merits of the classical education has a long history. Recent years have made few additions to its fund of arguments, and much of what was said in the nineteenth century is still relevant. We can still read with profit what Henry Sidgwick wrote during his early Cambridge years when he was classical lecturer at Trinity. Published in 1867 in a symposium[1] edited by F. W. Farrar – the author of *Eric* who became an eminent Victorian Dean of Canterbury – Sidgwick's article remains one of the shrewdest surveys ever produced of the educational case for Latin and Greek. Progressive men were growing tired of the Kennedys and Moberlys who ruled the mid-Victorian public school establishment, and the symposium was the manifesto of a generation in revolt. Most of the contributors were schoolmasters or young dons: E. E. Bowen, John Seeley, William Johnson ("They told me, Heraclitus . .") Cory. Farrar himself was teaching at Harrow. They were men whose lives were bound up with the study of antiquity – we find no traces here of that imperceptive utilitarianism which had Wells for its champion a few years later – but they were aware of

[1] *Essays on a Liberal Education* ed. F. W. Farrar. London 1867.

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interests and problems to which the verse and prose composition of their boyhood provided no clue. Their own training had been narrow, and their realisation of this fact made them passionately convinced that education ought to serve the needs of society. In Sidgwick's case, this conviction was particularly strong. But what makes his essay of greater value than the rest – so that it can serve to represent the whole book for us – is its comprehensiveness. He deals with every aspect of the classical discipline, shouldering his way through the old conventional tangle of arguments with a massive and irrefutable logic. The power of his mind is impressive.

He describes the 'theory of classical education' as

> the body of reasons which taken together, may be supposed to persuade the intelligence of the country that the present course of instruction in the Greek and Latin languages and literature is the best thing that can be applied in the minds of English boys in the year 1867 . . .

Our attention is called simultaneously to the arguments for classics, the method by which classics is taught and the demands of nineteenth century life. The arguments, the method and the social needs ought to be in harmony; and Sidgwick's first care is to point out where they are not. We shall see him dismissing reasons for studying Latin or Greek, which are good reasons in theory, because they involve benefits that actual methods of teaching failed to exploit. We shall also see him making light of benefits which the classical course of his day did offer when he finds that these have no relevance to the needs of his age. He is a realist.

The first part of the essay discusses the value we are to place on classical studies in professional education. It had been claimed that Latin ought to be learnt by all scholars concerned with the past, by all lawyers who need to know Roman Law, by all doctors who should be familiar with the language of their prescriptions. It had been claimed also that both Latin and Greek were indispensable for the clergy who had to study the Bible and the Fathers, and were useful for scientists whose terminology had a classical source. Sidgwick agrees that scholars of a historical sort cannot do without Latin, that a minority of them

ought also to study Greek, and that in this minority the clergy ought to be represented. But there he stops. He has too much common sense to ask us to believe that it is indeed necessary for a clergyman to read his Bible in Greek or for every lawyer to be an expert on Roman Law. As for the doctors and the scientists, half a day would suffice to teach them the words they require, and in any case, the etymology of a technical term is often misleading. What emerges from his analysis is that in a modern society Greek has a small but sure place as a specialised study – ranking some way above Egyptology or Anglo-Saxon, but below the more vital contemporary languages – while the value of Latin as a vocational acquirement will depend directly on the significance we assign to the past development of our culture. This would appear to be a most important conclusion, but its many implications are left unexamined. We shall need to come back to them later.

Sidgwick then turns to the time-honoured claim that the classical discipline furnishes the best possible liberal education, and the reader who feels that the crux of the argument has been reached is due for a surprise. The enduring interest of classical literature and culture, vaunted by a myriad champions as the one indisputable reason for learning Latin and Greek, receives no more than a bare mention. It is true that the signal merits of the ancient heritage are freely admitted. Sidgwick does not quarrel with the Humanist tradition in general terms. But the admission is not allowed to have any practical consequences. For Sidgwick denies that the literature and culture of Greece and Rome have any real link with the classical discipline which he knows.

His disillusionment with current teaching methods leads him to ignore the great theoretical problem of what classical studies could contribute to education if they were properly pursued, and he contents himself with demonstrating how far the schools of his day were from giving any real insight into either literature or culture. Can we assume, he asks, that an ordinary schoolboy or undergraduate who did not educate himself by private

reading would have any clear idea of ancient civilisation and how it differed from our own? And how many people who are not engaged in teaching Latin and Greek read the ancient authors once they have left school?

> In the effort to prepare his mind for composition, a boy is led to contemplate his authors under conditions as unfavourable to the development of pure taste and sound criticism as can possibly be conceived. He is led to break the diction of the great masters into fragments for the purpose of mechanical ornamentation, generally clumsy and often grotesque. His memory (as an advocate exultingly phrases it) is "stored with precious things", that is, it is stored with long words, salient extravagances and mannerisms . . .

And that is not the whole story. When an attempt is made to recommend literary merit, the terms used are so crude and patently untrue that they are bound to give rise to confusion and rebellious contradiction. Sidgwick quotes several examples of pompous, unthinking critical comments, and it is shocking to remember how often one has met similar monstrosities.

> The classical authors condemn all false ornament, all tinsel, all ungraceful and unshapely work . . .

as if there was no false ornament in Aeschylus, no tinsel in Ovid, no ungracefulness in Thucydides which even the untutored taste of the young could perceive.

In Sidgwick's view, the traditional claim that classical studies impart a cultural and literary insight could not be maintained; for teachers of Latin and Greek lacked all interest in these wider aspects of their subject and so lacked the competence to expound them. The great central fortress of the case for a classical education had become indefensible because of the hebetude of its garrison. If Matthew Arnold's grand old fortifying curriculum was to establish its right to be regarded as a liberal training, that right would have to rest on the benefits which flow from studying not the literature, but the ancient languages.

Orderly as ever, Sidgwick lists these alleged benefits: a clear grasp of the nature of grammar and syntax, the acquiring of a sound basis for an understanding of philology, mastery of the art of writing, practice in logical thought. He begins his examination of them by pointing out that under each of these heads it is possible to formulate a case for learning Latin or for learning

Greek, the case for Latin being generally the stronger. What one cannot do in this context is to prove that both languages need to be learnt. So he decides to concentrate on Latin.

He admits that a child who has learnt Latin, which is so different from English, will have a better idea of the general principles of grammar and syntax than he would have had if his studies had been limited to his mother tongue. But the gain, though real, is a small one, and the extra effort involved is very great. It is plain that no one would choose to learn Latin for this reason alone. As for Latin's usefulness to the philologist, that again is authentic, but unimportant. Philology is not like Mathematics or Natural Sciences or History. It is not a subject which must be known to a great many people if our society is to function in its normal manner. The fact that Latin prepares the ground does not therefore give Latin a claim to form part of our general education.

These are minor points anyway and arguments thought up by theorists. No schoolmaster teaches Latin in order to promote his pupils' understanding of the general characteristics of grammar or in order to train them to be philologists. But many schoolmasters sincerely believe that the exercises they set will make boys write in a more stylish and logical fashion. Moberly, writing some time before Sidgwick, had made resounding claims for translation from Latin as a way of teaching English.

> The art of throwing English with facility into sentence-moulds made in another language . . . what is this but to learn to have the choicest, most varied, words and sentence frames of our own language constantly at command so that, whatever varieties of thought and meaning present themselves to a man's mind, he will never be at a loss for expressions to convey them with an accuracy at once forcible and subtle to the mind of his hearers . . .

and he also maintained that Latin prose composition teaches a master-secret which will make a man a good writer in any language. Sidgwick submits these pompous claims to a careful scrutiny. He grants that translation widens one's command of phrase. But does it really promote good style? We must face the fact that a Latin phrase will often lack a good English equivalent. The translator has often to sacrifice either the full sense of

the Latin or the fluency of his English; and since our pedagogic tradition worships accuracy, the latter sacrifice is the one which boys are encouraged to make. It is clumsy English that they practise writing. When Moberly's praises of translation are submitted to this kind of analysis, they lose much of their lustre, and his vaunted 'master-secret' fares even worse. Sidgwick concludes that turning an English text into Latin does make us more fully aware of its meaning, and that Latin with its habit of using subordinate clauses does bring home to us more completely than English the logical connections between ideas. But again these gains are to some extent nullified by disadvantages. An exclusive concern with subtleties of phrasing often leads to a neglect of those broad effects linked to the general structure of a work that are of supreme importance in writing; and the logic of Latin is after all an alien logic. Each language has its own way of presenting ideas; and keeping the Latin way in mind may well be a hindrance rather than help in writing English.

Having clearly indicated the limits of the help which Latin as it was being taught could give the student who wanted to learn how to write and think, Sidgwick arrives at a conclusion which must have seemed very revolutionary in his day. He suggests that what is taught through Latin could be more effectively and more economically taught through reading and writing English. Translating into and from Latin does teach a boy some useful things about the art of expression, but the knowledge he acquires has notable gaps in it, gaps which would not occur if he was learning to compose in his own language.

Latin therefore emerges as having only a weak claim to be regarded as a liberal study; and Greek is at the most a possible substitute for Latin. We must remember however that Sidgwick is not considering the potentialities of Latin and Greek as instruments of education. He is concerned only with the ancient languages as they were taught in his day. It is that traditional discipline which he finds wanting. Latin he feels must have a place in the curriculum of our schools because without it we cannot understand our history; but the place he has in mind is

plainly not one of great importance. In the pattern he recommends for English education, Latin is dethroned from its central position. It is to play a secondary role, subordinate to such subjects of wide appeal as mathematics and science.

1963

Henry Sidgwick wanted to see Latin and Greek competing for classroom time with English, Modern Languages and Science. This Victorian reformer was one of the fathers of the modern grammar school. Our curriculum is a realisation of his progressive dream. But no attentive reader of his essay could imagine him for a moment unconditionally satisfied with what we have achieved. When he attacked the special status which Latin and Greek enjoyed in the nineteenth century, when he called for a wider curriculum, what he had in mind was a competition between subjects in which all would have an equal chance: and this was a utopian conception quite out of keeping with the real conditions of the educational jungle.

Sidgwick was an able thinker, but he was no historian, and he failed to grasp the nature of social change. He did not see that processes of growth or decline, once begun, usually continue with a blind impetus well beyond the point where the theoretician would like to have them stop. In order to dethrone Latin and Greek from their favoured position in the curriculum, he helped to set on foot a campaign of criticism which involved every aspect of classical studies, and it did not occur to him that the effect of these criticisms would inevitably outlive their purpose. Give a dog a bad name and hang him. The educational reformers of the late nineteenth century gave Latin a bad name, and we late in the twentieth still have to struggle against the views they popularised: that Latin is dreary, that it is useless, that it is remote. A boy to-day cannot choose to study Latin as freely as he would choose German or Geography or Mathematics. He has to reckon with a hostile public opinion, and he has to learn to defend his fancy against critical parents, friends and enquirers.

The present state of classical studies has been the subject of extensive debate. Teachers who have seen their classes dwindle, their Latin periods cut to a derisory minimum, their ablest pupils creamed off year after year to swell the Science Side, have cried out in despair, prophesying a final and irremediable collapse; and their Jeremiads were promptly rebutted by others who, more sanguine or more fortunately placed, felt that everything was still for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The optimists ransacked the Statistics of Public Education for England and Wales and pointed out that more children were studying Latin than had ever studied it before, that the numbers of A-level candidates in the classical languages had doubled since the war, and that the number of distinctions in Greek was unusually high. Meanwhile, the straws in the wind of change moved bewilderingly in different directions. The Pope announced his advocacy of Latin. But Cambridge abandoned its traditional demand for knowledge of the language as a condition of entry. Russian scholars were reported to be taking an interest in the classics. But at Oxbridge more than one college noted a sudden drop in the number of its classical scholarship candidates. And faced with this welter of contradictory evidence, the unbiassed could only stand and wonder.

Controversies have their funny side. But in effect the matter is desperately urgent. We have reached a point where we must try to discover what is likely to happen to classical studies. The facts are there, in school and university records, in H.M.S.O.'s invaluable blue books. What we need is a qualified interpreter. This is a field where the amateur is a menace. Untrained, unable to judge the significance of the figures he deploys, he is likely to find what he wants to find. It is time that some Association that has the welfare of classical studies at heart or some Institute or Department of Education employed a professional statistician to perform what is after all a relatively simple task and to analyse the information we have to hand. Such an analysis would not solve all our problems but it would put an end to a great many misconceptions.

We are dealing with a process of change, and what matters is not this or that absolute total but the indication of broad trends. That much is obvious even to the statistically uninstructed. No one seriously doubts that there has been a decrease since the nineteen-thirties in the proportion of able students opting for classics at sixth-form level. What we need is information about the character of this decrease. Does it show signs of stopping? Or is it likely to continue? If it is continuing, will it do so fast or slowly? Where is the loss greatest? Among students of high ability or among those of more moderate attainments? Among males or among females? And a survey of the employment situation would also yield useful data. What happens to students of the classics? Are the opportunities open to them better or worse than they were in the nineteen-twenties and thirties? How do they compare with the opportunities open to their contemporaries who have taken History or Science or Engineering? The attraction of a subject – and therefore its place in the curriculum – does depend in the long run on the openings it can promise to the energies of the ambitious.

While hoping for the best from the results of a professional survey, it is plain that we ought to be prepared for the worst. Can we find a country where classical studies of the traditional kind still possess a dynamic appeal? Where we see them holding their own, it is usually by virtue of some connection extraneous to the interests of the grand old fortifying curriculum. In Italy, Latin benefits from its close links with the vernacular. Rome is the focal point of the Italian past. In Roman Catholic countries and in Roman Catholic Schools, the language of Virgil receives the regard due to the language of the liturgy. In the United States, a growing interest in medieval culture has given useful support to more conventional Latin studies. Cicero is conned, that Aquinas may be read.

The history of Education is heavy with survivals. But although the past shows many examples of outmoded forms of study keeping their place in schools, for decades and even for centuries, the rule still holds good that once all dynamic interest in

a subject has faded, it is doomed to extinction. Learning that appeals to the imagination of the public is certain to flourish. Where such an appeal is lacking, a decline must be expected. Why was it that Greek and Latin were able to dominate secondary and higher education for over four hundred years? The origins of that dominance go back to the days of the Humanists who believed that the ancient literatures provided the best key to a proper understanding of life, and persuaded the world that their belief was right. They pleaded their case to such good effect that the pre-eminence of the classical heritage was accepted not only by the educated, but also by many who never saw the inside of a grammar school. Latin became a magic word, and a climate of opinion was created which sustained the work of Colet and was still there to sustain the work of Arnold and Thring.

Classical studies flourished so long as the legend created by the Humanists kept its hold on men's minds. But the end of the story is as instructive as its beginning. When belief in Science replaced belief in Latin as humanity's guiding star at the end of the nineteenth century, the fortunes of the classical discipline began to decline, and it was the popular prejudice built up by the advocates of Science against Latin, which made that decline catastrophic. A hundred years ago the majority of those receiving secondary education were taught Latin and Greek and little else. At that time, being educated and having received a classical training were almost synonymous terms. To-day only about one child in every three hundred taking the Ordinary Level Examination has learnt Greek, and one in twenty-five has learnt Latin to the level needed for this particular, fairly elementary test. And if that does not represent a catastrophic decline, what does?

If the fortunes of a subject are geared to the prevailing climate of opinion – and the facts suggest that this is so – then it is evident that we cannot hope to see a revival of classical studies, cannot indeed reasonably hope to see Latin maintain its present position in the schools, unless we can bring about a change in

that climate of opinion, unless we can make people at large believe once again in the value of Latin and Greek.

Can this be done? Those who have spent their lives working in the classical field rarely feel any doubt about the value and richness of their subject. But intuitive convictions of this sort have not the power to sway public opinion. If intuition is to persuade, it must learn to argue. Reasons must be found, and they must be reasons which carry conviction to the modern mind.

The traditional material of the classical discipline consists of the two ancient languages and literatures together with what is otherwise known about the history and culture of Greece and Rome. This is a very large field. A systematic examination of its educational possibilities would fill a fair-sized book. We must therefore limit the scope of our enquiry and consider for the moment the case of Latin alone. In any case, most of the arguments justifying Latin can be seen to apply with equal force to Greek, and the further question of whether one should teach Greek or Latin, or must indeed teach both, is not of such immediate importance.

If Latin studies have any value, that value must lie either in the language, or in the literature, or in the knowledge we gain generally about Roman culture, or, of course, in any two or three of these fields. Let us therefore take them in order.

The educational possibilities of the Latin language studied for its own sake – for we are not at this juncture concerned with its value as an instrument for literary or historical study – were carefully analysed by Sidgwick, and it is difficult not to agree with his conclusions. A knowledge of Latin is indispensable for the philologist who studies the history of the Romance languages. Those of us who do not pursue that speciality may gain from knowing Latin an insight into the nature of linguistic organisation and more particularly we may gain an insight into the nature of languages like Italian and French; but in either case we are unlikely to learn more than we would from the study of any Romance language. We have not here an adequate reason for learning Latin in addition to or in place of

French. As for the various advantages derived from the exercises that play so great a part in Latin teaching, translating Latin into English certainly improves our English vocabulary but it also tempts us into employing awkward idioms; and if our aim is to gain a better mastery of English, we should be more usefully engaged writing English essays. Similarly the labour of turning a piece of English into Latin prose may develop our patience, industry and accuracy and may improve our power of ordering what we write, but these are all benefits which could be gained through the study of other more generally useful subjects like Science, Mathematics and English.

In short, when we try to justify a Latin course which has the learning of the language for its aim without reference to the study of literature, the arguments that lie to hand are unconvincing. They are unlikely to lead our contemporaries to change their minds about the merits of the classical discipline. The advantages offered by the language as such are too slight and too nebulous to provide reasonable grounds for the expenditure of so much educational time and effort. If we want a persuasive argument to support Latin studies we shall have to look elsewhere than to the interest of grammar and the training provided by the practice of translation.

What was the basis of men's esteem for the classics at the time when the classics were esteemed? It was as a source of knowledge about life that the Humanists extolled the ancient literatures, and Latin was invested with an aura of magic because it was regarded as a key to wisdom. Useful knowledge and wisdom are two things men seek from education. And why did the esteem which the Humanists had built up eventually decline? Uselessness was the main charge that men like H. G. Wells brought against the classics. And to a great extent they were right. Latin and Greek taught along the lines described by Farrar and his colleagues were useless when set against the newly developing scientific knowledge. The mathematical, medical, technical and political information which made the ancient writings precious in the fifteenth century was long out

of date. The new civilisations of Europe had far outstripped their classical predecessors in all material and organisational respects. And although we now see that other forms of valuable information – and indeed wisdom – could be drawn from the study of antiquity, it is evident that the teachers and scholars of Sidgwick's day made little attempt to discover them. There had been a struggle early on in the century in the German universities between the advocates of a broader discipline, studying the classics as part of the history of civilisation, and the textual criticism favoured by Gottfried Hermann. The textual critics had won. Consequently, the classicists of the Victorian period – all more or less dominated by the powerful influence of German learning – turned to the study of texts as their main occupation. Producing correct editions is an indispensable part of classical scholarship, but it is the part most remote from 'useful knowledge and wisdom'. So the nineteenth century scholars were not in a position to make good the losses which time had inflicted on the classical heritage. They could not tap fresh sources of interest. As for the teachers – their main concern was to ensure their pupils' success in examinations. The writing of classical proses was the accepted test of ability, the key to success at Oxford and Cambridge and then in politics, the Law or the Church. So the schools struggled to promote a high degree of technical efficiency in the composition of these linguistic exercises, and that again was not an activity which could impress the public at large as holding any promise of human betterment. The classics had won men's esteem because they illuminated the road to a better and fuller life. They lost that esteem because the illumination they offered seemed to fail.

This is a story with a moral. The future of classical learning depends on our being able to show that it makes a valid contribution to man's understanding of his world and therefore to the betterment of life. We must therefore, in considering the possibilities of the subject, take our stand on the fund of human experience which it reveals to us.

The educational possibilities of the classical heritage are manifestly great. The Humanists did no more than scratch the surface of what they inherited from the past. They found so much easy treasure that they did not bother to look further. Now that surface treasures have been taken from us, we shall need to dig deeper. But then we are better equipped than the Humanists were for the task. We know for example a good deal more than they did about the connections which exist between language and experience. Words are admittedly labels, and they do not convey in any particular instance more than a fraction of what we may be trying to communicate, so that philosophers have had a great deal to say during the last seventy years about the distorting effects of language. But language is not just a faulty mirror. It is a dynamic medium. We know next to nothing of experience in its immediate state before the mind has got to work upon it. And the mind works with words or with simple conceptions – mental pictures and suchlike – which are mere substitutes for words. The language we use shapes our experience.

Similar considerations apply in the case of literature. No book gives us a true image of life. There is always distortion. An author selects. He twists what he knows and feels about life in order to serve a literary aim. A novel must have a story. A play must be built round dramatic situations. Poetry makes use of pattern and suggestion. Nevertheless, a poem, a play, a novel, and for that matter an oration, a history, a philosophical dialogue, all reflect to some degree the picture which a particular man formed of his experience. Moreover these pictures do not stand alone. A man's recorded impressions of life are his only in part. The words he employs, the classifications he uses, analysing what he sees around him, even his sensitivity, the things he has been trained to notice, come to him from the culture to which he belongs. The literature of a nation is a record of the mould into which that nation's experience was poured.

We see in antiquity a world different from our own. And that difference has in itself a great value. The hardest thing to learn

when one is young – and the most necessary – is that things can genuinely look different to others from what they do to oneself. Some people never learn this lesson, yet its importance is obvious for personal relations, for all forms of communication and co-operation. Differences of view are based to a great extent on differences of background, on the facts people are conditioned to keep in mind or the facts they neglect, and the problems involved can be systematically examined. Psychology and sociology have made a beginning here; but can we not say also with some confidence that studying the culture of an ancient race, widely different from our own, seeing how their view of life was related to the information at their command and to the conditions in which they lived, would not be a bad introduction to the subject of how the human mind is shaped. If the proper understanding of ancient culture and ways of thought was made the object of classical learning, the classical discipline would stand a good chance of being accepted by our contemporaries as a branch of study likely to help them to the kind of knowledge they desire. The misunderstandings that arise as a result of differences in background between individuals, social groups and nations are the next great obstacle which the human race must overcome. For the next half century or so, our main effort will be in this direction, and if the classicist can show that he has something to contribute, his place in the educational world will be secure.

The problem of ensuring the survival of classical studies can be worked out simply enough in theory. The status of a subject in the world of education depends upon its prestige. Here in the twentieth century, prestige attaches to knowledge that promises mastery of the material world and is coming more and more to attach to knowledge that promises to facilitate understanding between men and therefore to promote co-operation. The glamour that surrounds the name of science is beginning to pass, in part at least, to sociological and cultural studies. The language, literature and other memorials of Greece and Rome could provide the student of culture with valuable material.

Development of this aspect of the subject would give classical studies the prestige required for survival, and not for survival only, but for an honoured place in the curriculum.

The theory is simple. The difficulties begin when one considers what could be done in practice. The scientific study of culture is a relatively new branch of knowledge, and to a great extent it is still bound up with the study of primitive tribes. It is certain to extend into the historical field, which offers excellent material, but all the spadework is still before us. We must learn to handle literary material for cultural purposes as the early anthropologists learned to improve on the untutored observations of travellers.

Developments of this sort normally begin with the explorations of pioneer scholars. Eventually the new subject is established in the university curriculum, and then seeps very gradually into the schools. But all this takes a long time, and we have not time to spare. It seems very likely that if Latin is to be saved as a school subject it must be saved now, while we have the teachers and a sizeable nucleus of students. Another twenty years on the downward path, and the way back will be blocked with almost insurmountable obstacles. If a new line is to be taken, it must be taken simultaneously at every level, by the whole of the profession as a matter of policy. We cannot wait for the happy moment when classical studies will eventually commend themselves to the contemporary world by reason of their achievements. We must win public esteem as soon as possible on the grounds of what we expect to achieve. The Humanists did not wait for the revelation of the knowledge buried in their manuscripts before they started recommending the study of the classical texts.

The idea that classical scholarship could make a contribution in a field which we regard as the province of the anthropologists and sociologists sounds more revolutionary than it really is. Such a contribution would be made – initially at any rate – through the study of ancient institutions, customs and ways of thought. It would draw on material which has been already

explored. The change would be one of emphasis, a shift in the direction followed by research. And we can see this shift beginning already as a feature of the natural development of the subject.

The greatest re-orientation would have to occur in our approach to literature. Since the Renaissance, the most gifted among classical scholars have usually devoted themselves to textual criticism. As we have seen Sidgwick point out, the study of literature in his day was crude and unsystematic. A man was judged by the brilliance of his readings and the ingenuity of his syntactical analyses. These demanded profound knowledge and the mastery of complicated techniques; and they absorbed the best of his energies. Translation was another favourite skill; and a scholar would often devote exquisite care to the production of a stylish rendering. It was only when the text had been emended and annotated, and when the English version had been meticulously polished, that literary comment had its turn. It was an afterthought, a frill which had to be included because the text was famed after all as a literary work. But it was poor and amateurish by comparison with the rest.

We have seen many improvements since then. But progress has been along a narrow front. Classical scholars have been taking their cue from their contemporaries in the modern field, and their work has been marked by the same specialised orientation which we see in English and French criticism. The study of literature has been vitally influenced in this century by a movement which had its roots in an irritated reaction against the habit of finding ethical lessons in great art. Disgusted with the shallowness of the popular late-Victorian approach which made the masterpieces of the past into vehicles of a prim nursery morality, many modern critics have gone to the extreme of stating that literature was to be valued only for the aesthetic delight it bestowed. The function of the critic and scholar was therefore to promote this delight. This aestheticism has led to an interest in form and literary technique. The major advances of the last fifty years have been made in that field, while cultural

history and examination of great writers' thought-processes have been relatively speaking neglected.

The improvement which has taken place in the study of classical literature has not been therefore precisely the improvement most likely to win a general public approval. Aesthetic pleasure plays an important part in our lives. But when you have to invite a boy to spend six or seven years in the close study of literary works, and he (or his father) asks you how he will benefit from his labours, the statement that his capacity for enjoyment will be increased has not much persuasive force. The probability is that the boy has a taste for literature already. In a world full of problems where one has so much to do and a living to earn, is it proper for him to devote the best part of his youth to giving this taste a slightly sharper edge? And there is also the fact that music and painting offer an aesthetic pleasure that is at once keener and more accessible than any we gain from literature. Why should we not turn to these arts if aesthetic delight is our only goal? Why struggle with the intricacies of words?

The answer is that literature offers us a great deal more than pleasure. If it did not, it would have few students. The young see the record of experience there and seek after it in spite of the theories of their elders. They are right, and we could do worse than follow their lead. The time has now come for a serious study to switch from the textual field where a firm foundation has now been laid and to go beyond the now fashionable interest in aesthetic issues. We must recognise the fact that writing is one of the great human activities, on a par with earning a living and making war. It deserves study in all its aspects. The character of the emotions and ideas communicated, which depend upon the experience and values of the culture producing them, forms just as important a part of literary study as formal literary patterns, and is indeed more likely to interest our contemporaries.

We come therefore to the question of how the nature of Greek and Roman experience is to be studied, and how we can best form an idea of the particular conditions which affected the

communication of ideas in antiquity. At this stage the answer is simple, at any rate where research is concerned. The scholar must note, classify and assess. Most of the questions are still unanswered. What was the effect of any of the examples from mythology used in certain kinds of poetry and rhetoric? Did they convince anyone? What was the real force of the conventional morality on which Cicero bases his arguments? How far was it accepted? As much or less than Christian morality is accepted today? Problems of this kind cannot be finally decided, but we can discover much more about them than we know today. The institutions of Greece and Rome, the conditions of their public life, relations between client and patron, master and slave, have been explored, in some cases by recent research, but the results of that research have not been compared with the picture we get of these institutions and relationships in literary works. How did the ideas of the ancients about their society differ from the truth? And how can these differences be explained? Another set of problems concern the nature of sensibility. The classical writers present us with a view of the world which is very largely conventional, which belongs to a literary tradition that each age takes over from the last. There are elements in Ovid's imagery which go back to the Homeric epics. The remarkable persistence of this tradition suggests that the sensibility of the ancients may not have varied and developed to the extent that European sensibility has done during the last five hundred years. Nevertheless there were changes, traceable in variations of detail from poet to poet, which it would be instructive to explore. The apparently unchanging character of classical culture is a phenomenon which merits investigation.

The openings for research and university study are numerous. It is when we move to the schools that the real difficulties present themselves. An O-level course whose sole purpose was to impart knowledge of Latin as a language would never win public support. It would be useful for those who went on to do Latin in the sixth form and university, but a school subject must offer something that is valued even to those who take it only at

an elementary level. It is plain therefore that, alongside the language, children would right from the start have to do the greatest possible amount of work on literature and culture; and this involves a considerable change in method.

The teaching we give at present does not aim merely at giving the pupil a good knowledge of Latin. The course is an educational instrument forged in the nineteenth century as a preparation for tests aimed to select the intellectually competent and emotionally reliable. This becomes immediately obvious the minute we start comparing it with methods used in the modern field. It is to be presumed that language-schools know their business. Do any of them spend weeks and months training their pupils to be accurate translators? It is worth observing that the level of accuracy demanded from a classical student in a university scholarship is far higher than the level required in UNO examinations from men who make translating their life's work. Or is anyone learning Spanish or Russian ever forced, when translating into the language, to mould his style in imitation of particular authors? Learning Latin will never be an easy task. But if we are honest with ourselves, we shall have to admit that we make it a great deal more difficult than it needs to be. As Father Walter J. Ong pointed out, we have turned the simple business of instruction into a sort of puberty rite where the intelligent boy is driven to prove himself.

Our course would be simpler if we contented ourselves with just teaching the language. And we do not indeed need to teach the language as a whole. The value of Latin lies in our ability to read it. What we want to produce are students who can understand a Latin text as quickly and correctly as if it were written in English. Speed (which we neglect) is as important as accuracy. The student at the end of his course should be able to read books, not just passages.

And here another consideration creeps in. The usefulness of Latin is not limited to the classicist. The language is indispensable to the medieval scholar; and it is a well-known fact that the progress of Renaissance studies is gravely hampered at the

moment by lack of competent Latinists. But to be useful in these fields knowledge of the language must involve the ability to read rapidly and at length. This provides an additional reason for changing our present teaching methods. A learned discipline must take care to serve the wider advancement of learning.

Reorganised with the primary aim of promoting reading knowledge, even a short Latin course should allow for the study of several books with ample time for comment. And it is on the nature of the commentary given that the prestige of Latin as a school subject would ultimately depend. In the final analysis, the whole burden will fall on the shoulders of the teaching profession. If they can develop an approach to their material which chimes in with contemporary interests, classical studies will flourish. If they cannot do this, Latin's day is done.

Each author will offer different opportunities, but certain topics for discussion will crop up again and again. We shall be studying literary works. The art of writing is infinitely complex, and one who knows his business can find a great number of things to explain. There are the demands of the genre, the pressure exerted by the author's conscious aim on his choice of subject-matter, the importance of tone, pace, atmosphere. These are general considerations which apply as much to modern as ancient writing, and the more emphasis we put on them, the greater will be the educational value of the lesson.

The topics mentioned in connection with research could also serve as classroom material. Children could to some extent be made to understand the values and the interpretation of life implicit in a particular text, and how these compare with what we think today. The connections between beliefs could also be explained. They are more important educationally than the beliefs themselves, as are also the limitations which are not put into words but are taken for granted when a principle is put forward. The obvious example in this connection is that ancient ideas on justice and democracy must always be considered within the context of a slave-owning society. Sensibility and its relation to tradition could also be studied, particularly in the

poets, through an elementary analysis of the images and other references to the sensory universe.

None of these topics are new. None are altogether absent from the lessons we give now. The need is for a shift from a cursory and ill-informed treatment to teaching fired by a passionate interest, based also on an informed understanding of literary, intellectual and social problems. This will not be easy to achieve. In prose composition, in the unravelling of syntax problems and unseens, we are engaged in imparting technical skills. The teacher has mastered these skills back in the past. He can display them to advantage. He is the expert craftsman among the clumsy. The discussion of values, of social, intellectual and literary developments offers by contrast great difficulties and few satisfactions. Here the teacher cannot be sure of his ground. He must think, revise his ideas, make an effort to keep up to date. His own principles, the way he conducts his life may come to be challenged. There are no opportunities here for comforting shows of *expertise*. There is only the eternal struggle to elucidate and educate.

Two things emerge forcibly from any serious consideration of what one might call 'the Latin problem'. The first is that some considerable change in teaching method is inevitable if the subject is to survive. The second is that the majority of the profession – and particularly its older members – are bound to feel opposed to this change, which will demand great sacrifices on their part. We are faced, through no fault of our own, with a situation where our only alternative to hard work and hard thinking is to watch our subject dwindle till it disappears from the curriculum and leaves us stranded. The testing moment has arrived for classical studies. We must prove that they are fortifying, that they strengthen man's power to deal with the problems of life. We must prove their worth or see them perish.

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